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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the effectiveness of a program for increasing students' abilities to self-assess writing. The targeted population consisted of a class of second-grade students in an upwardly mobile community located in the suburban Chicago area of Arlington Heights, Illinois. The inability to self-assess writing was documented through teacher observation, student interviews given by the teacher, and collegial surveys. Analysis of probable cause data revealed a lack of student understanding of the writing process and a lack of class time given to the teaching and practicing of self-assessment skills. Teacher surveys revealed that the primary method of assessment was teacher based. A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledgeable others and a review of the literature, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, resulted in the selection of instructional strategies in the form of a combination of portfolio assessment and process writing instruction using a writer's workshop. Teacher observations, student surveys, and student interviews indicated that students made progress in their writing and in their ability to self-assess their own progress in writing. (Contains 20 references. Appendixes present survey instruments, interview questions, and forms used during writing conferences.) (Author/RS)

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Improving Students' Ability to Self-Assess Writing

by

*Dena Billingsley

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Abstract

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TITLE: Improving Students Ability To Self-Assess Writing

ABSTRACT: This report describes a program for increasing students' abilities to self-assess writing. The targeted population consists of a class of second grade students in an upwardly mobile community located in a suburban area of Chicago. The inability to self-assess writing will be documented through teacher observation, student interviews given by the teacher, and collegial surveys.

Analysis of probable cause data reveals a lack of student understanding of the writing process, and a lack of class time given to the teaching and practicing of self-assessment skills. Teacher surveys reveal the primary method of assessment is teacher based.

A review of solution strategies suggested by knowledge others and the review of literature, combined with an analysis of the problem setting, has resulted in the selection of instructional strategies to improve students self-assessing skills and the implementation of a portfolio assessment program.

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Chapter 1

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The second grade students at Edgar Allan Poe Elementary school exhibit poor self-assessing skills in the area of writing as evidenced by teacher observation, collegial input, and anecdotal records.

Description of the Immediate Problem Setting

This project will take place in School District 21 located in the northwest suburban area of Chicago. The school involved, Edgar Allan Poe Elementary, is located in the suburb Arlington Heights. Edgar Allan Poe is a preschool through sixth grade building. It also houses the bilingual and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Of Poe's 484 students, 63.4 percent are Hispanic , 15.7 percent are Asian/ Pacific Islanders, and two percent are Black. Of the total population, seven percent are low-income students and 11.2 percent are limited English proficient students. Poe school has a 95.3 percent attendance rate and does not have a chronic truancy problem. Poe does have a 18.9 percent student mobility rate, which is above the district's average (School District 21, 1992).

The Poe staff contains 29 certified staff members and 9 non-certified staff members. The building has a principal and assistant principal, who is also a full-time classroom teacher. There is also a building council committee, which is a decision-making body for school wide decisions, comprised of teacher representatives and the principal.

The staff uses many instructional styles including: thematic planning, whole

language, cooperative learning, hands-on science and math, and is currently moving towards a technology-based instruction. Many of the grade levels plan collaboratively and are given released time to do so.

Poe Elementary was built in 1969 and provides an adequate educational environment. The library media center is small and not designed to house a computer lab, which it currently does. The building is presently under construction adding a new wing which will include a physical education center. The present gym will be converted into a new and expanded library media center housing a computer lab and reference center.

The specific classroom involved is a second grade regular education class. This classroom is part of a primary grade team consisting of 1 kindergarten classroom, 1 first grade classroom, 3 multi-age 1-2 classrooms, and 1 second grade classroom, which is the one involved in the study. All classrooms are regular education classes. There is some mainstreaming of ESL students for specific subjects.

Description of the Surrounding Community

The district has, nine elementary and two junior high schools. There are a total of 360 teachers. Ninety-seven percent of the staff is Caucasian, two and five tenths percent is Hispanic, and less the one percent is Black or Asian. The staff is 89 percent female. The average years of teaching experience is 15 years. Fifty-four percent of the staff have Master's Degree. The student to teacher ratio is 19.1:1. This ratio is somewhat misleading, due to the fact, it takes into account all teachers, not just the classroom teachers. The average class in the district has 25 students. The administration office is headed by a superintendent who has a support staff comprised of assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction, special education, building and grounds maintenance, personnel , and business. The assistant superintendents

also have support staffs that include consultants or specialists in curricular areas and technology. The average teacher salary is $42,662 and the average administrative salary is $70,093 annually. The operating expenditure per pupil is $5,516 (School District 21, 1992).

Of the 11 schools in District 21, Poe Elementary is the only school in the suburb of Arlington Heights. The city of Arlington Heights has a population of 75,460 people, ninety-five percent of whom are Caucasian, three and seven tenths percent are Asian/ Pacific Islanders, two and seven tenths are of Hispanic origins, and less than one percent are Black. There are 8,727 people who do not speak English "very well". This varies considerably from the school population, and could be the result of the bilingual and ESL programs that are bussed from other suburbs within District 21 (Village of Arlington Heights, 1990).

The median household income is $51,331 , and 1,788 people are living below the poverty level. The average value of a single family home is $182,160 , and the average rent for an apartment is $828 . This is an upwardly mobile community, 89.8 percent of the population are high school graduates, while 39.5 percent have earned a Bachelor's Degree or higher (Village of Arlington Heights, 1990).

The school has an active PTO which is thought by the staff to be a benefit. Parents are generally supportive of the school programs and staff. They are frequently seen in school volunteering to help with special programs and they help in the classrooms. The PTO holds several fund-raising activities through out the year. The proceeds are given to the school or individual classroom teachers to purchase supplies that are not covered by the district.

Regional and National Context of the Problem

A quote from Lord Kelvin best sums up the traditional view of good

assessment, "When you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a very meager and unsatisfactory kind." Jacob Viner expresses the view shared by many today, "When you can measure it, when you can express it in numbers, your knowledge is still of a meager and unsatisfactory kind." (Costa quoting Kelvin and Viner as cited in Burke, 1993, p. vi)

In the 1990's assessment has emerged as one of the major components in the restructured school. One cannot open an educational journal or attend a workshop without reading and hearing "alternative," "performance," or "authentic assessment" (Burke, 1993, p. ix). Controversy and dissatisfaction of the traditional standardized test is nothing new. The time has come to focus on the process of learning instead of the product (Burke, 1993). The new push for performance tests results, in part, from intense criticism of the impact of state testing programs (O,Neil, 1992) Students taking part in performance assessment will be asked to synthesized content or problem solve. Examples include; writing essays, performing a group science experiment, or keeping portfolios (O'Neil, 1992). The emphasis is shifting from testing individual skills to observing behaviors (Farr and Tone 1994).

There has also been a great interest in writing instruction recently that has provided major studies on how children develop as writers (Calkins, 1986). Writing assessment traditional consisted of naming and identifying something, and it was assumed that if we can name something it has been mastered (Calkins, 1986 and Farr and Tone, 1994). Many schools across the country are shifting writing instruction to a process based instruction.

One of the main elements in both authentic assessment and process writing is the use of self-assessment. Self-assessment allows students to articulate awareness and understanding of their own progress and to develop into independent learners Farr and Tone, 1994).

Chapter 2

PROBLEM EVIDENCE AND PROBABLE CAUSE

As pointed out in chapter 1 authentic assessment was become a major component in the restructured school. This concern is evidenced by the many states and school districts mandating some type of authentic assessment program. State-wide testing here in Illinois includes an authentic writing sample. District 21 has mandated a portfolio system that requires teachers to collect, and also to select, at least two writing samples per student to be kept in a file folder and to be passed on to the teachers the following year.

Problem Evidence

The students at Edgar Allan Poe school are exhibiting a lack of understand of the writing process as shown through teacher surveys, student interviews, and teacher observation. A survey taken by 15 teachers, kindergarten through sixth grade, at Edgar Allan Poe school show that 87 percent of those teachers do teach a writing process that includes: pre-writing, drafting, revision, and editing. Ten out of 15 teachers felt that at least 50 percent of their students have an understanding of the writing process. On an average the teachers spent 0-30 minutes a day on writing instruction. Forty-seven percent of the teachers felt that the curriculum does a lot enough time to writing instruction. The primary type of assessment used by all 1-6 teachers is teacher assessment. Seventy-three percent of the teachers felt that teacher assessment benefits their students most as writers, compared to peer

assessment and self assessment.

The student interviews revealed a lack of understanding of the writing process. Four of the 23 students interviewed had no idea why anyone would write. Nineteen students felt that the proper use of mechanics is what made good writing. Twenty students had little idea that writing consisted of more than pre-writing, getting your ideas down, and checking for spelling. Only five out 23 students mentioned going back to add details or checking to make sure their writing made sense. When asked if they knew a good writer, 21 out 23 students responded positively and named a students within the classroom. Surprisingly not one students named an author or adult. When asked what made that person a good writer all 23 students responded with some type of combination that included neat handwriting, good spelling, or long text.

Probable Causes

In the teacher survey, all teachers K-6, are teaching a writing process that includes: pre-writing, drafting, revision, and many teachers feel that at least half of their class has an understanding of the process. Yet when you talk with students individually there seems to be a number of students who can not even describe the writing process, let alone apply it and understand it. This could be happening because the students are not internalizing the process due to lack of application time. Teachers could be rushing through the process in order to get through their grade level curriculum. The time restraint could also be why teachers are not allowing time for self assessment.

The literature suggests several underlying causes , one might note that the time and routine of writing is not consistent daily. According to Calkins (1986) students need the luxury of time, and they need blocks of time. Calkins also states that the most

creative environments in our society are not the kaleidoscopic environments in which everything is always changing and complex, but rather the predictable and consistent ones: the scholar's library, the researcher's laboratory, and the artist's studio. She further explains that each of these environments is deliberately kept predictable and simple because the work at hand the changing interactions around that work are so unpredictable and complex.

Assessment must be an essential part of instruction and learning (Navarrete,1990). There are far more instructional implications when students' writing ability is assessed through actual writing samples and not by questions about someone else's writing (O'Brien, 1992). Assessment of reading and writing must be both authentic and performance based.

The pace of a typical school is like a whirlwind. Teachers feel the need to "cover" so much. Things are being added to the curriculum all the time and little if anything is ever taken out. It is what Graves calls a cha-cha-cha curriculum. The days are so fragmented and contain so many interruptions. New special programs are added and piled upon the curriculum "We worry about covering the curriculum as if we believe that covering a topic means children will learn it. We don't stop to realize that we are rushing to "cover" the thirteen uses of commas in third grade, and again in fourth grade, and again in fifth grade, sixth, seventh, etc... and still students don't use commas correctly" (Calkins,1986, p.24.) We need to give students knowledge and not be afraid to use direct-teaching, but allow the pace of our schedule to also include application (Farr and Tone, 1994) But as teachers, the choice of what to "cover" and what should be kept, added, or eliminate from the curriculum is usually out of our hands.

Assessment must provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student (Valencia, 1990). Students need to view assessment as a way to evaluate

what they have learned, not as something done to appease others. The students must learn to value their assessments, as well as, the teachers assessment (Valencia, 1990). If a student is to improve, that student must be able to recognize what needs improvement (Farr and Tone, 1994).

Probable causes gathered from both the literature and the site include: teachers do not valuing self assessment, student lacking an understanding of the writing process, inadequate time given to writing instruction, the curriculum and school days are becoming too inflated, assessment not being a part of instruction and learning, and that assessment not providing reflection from students, as well as, teachers.

Chapter 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Review of the Literature

As stated in chapter 1, authentic assessment is a hot topic in education these days. There has also been a great interest in writing instruction recently that has provided us major studies on how children develop as writers (Calkins,1986). As a result of the studies, today there has been a shift from product based instruction and assessment to process based instruction and assessment. It was evident while conducting this literature review that little research has been done that pertains to selected age groups. There are many articles dealing with self-assessment and many dealing with writing instruction, but very few dealing with self-assessment of writing.

Writing assessment traditionally consisted of naming and identifying something, and it was assumed that if we could name something we have mastered it (Calkins, 1986 and Farr, 1994). Research is now showing that knowing the characteristics of products has little to do with the process of creating them (Calkins,1986 and Farr and Tone 1994). Many schools across the country , as well as District 21, have shifted their writing instruction to a process based instruction.

Schools now require more authentic and appropriate forms of assessment. Many classroom teachers are making performance-based assessments, and authentic assessments part of their instruction By combining assessment and instruction teachers have had to call upon non-traditional forms of assessments. This has meant that the learners have become actively involved in the assessment of their own learning (Calfee,1991).

One of the central elements of authentic assessment is the use of self-assessment , including both self-reflection and self-evaluation. Assessment tasks that provide opportunities for students to articulate awareness and understanding of their own work are crucial in the development of independent learners. Students will then control their own language growth if they are given time to monitor progress and set goals for the future (vanKraayenoord and Paris, 1993). Tasks that can enable self assessment include activities such as reviewing artifacts, understanding progress through record keeping, documenting interests, choices, and preferences, conferencing with teachers and peers, collaboratively writing with peers, and sharing personal responses and writings (vanKraayenoord and Paris, 1993).

Conferencing can provide excellent opportunities for both the student and the teacher to gain insight into the students learning. Self assessment can be targeted in conferences by the teacher playing the role of listener, instead of evaluator. The teacher acts as a sort of backboard, sending the ball back into the student's court (Calkins, 1986). Conferencing can at times provide opportunities to extend what the student can do as a learner. Teachers must remember to keep the writer the focus of the conference, not the writing piece.

There are two very different views of thought on what should go into a portfolio. Many proponents of language arts portfolios recommend collecting only the students' best efforts. This would be called a "show portfolio". It would be similar to what an artist or photographer would carry to an interview. The thought behind keeping only what the students feel is the best is that in doing so they come to value their own judgment and build self-confidence (Five, 1993). Five (1993) also recommends students labeling and ranking their pieces that include certain elements they would consider the best. For example, she would ask her students to spread out the pieces they have chosen as the best, them identify the two with the best lead lines and label

them. She would have the students continue this procedure using different criteria She states that usually the students find that they have labeled the same few pieces the most, thus giving them concrete evidence as to why one piece is better than other. She then concludes the activities by having the students self assess their own progress.

The other option is to create a collection of a student's work selected by the student with the teacher's help and input. To assure that portfolios promote a true sense of ownership the students must feel they have the primary control of its contents (Farr and Tone, 1994) Remember, portfolios are something a student does, not something done to a student. It should contain not only some of the student's best efforts, but also pre-writing and revision stages of writings. It should also include a variety of types of writing, including responses to reading, self reflections, student-teacher conference notes, and any other type of writing that shows and supports the writer's growth (Meyer, Paulson, and Paulson, 1991; Farr and Tone, 1994). Hansen (1992) takes this a step further by including items that reflect the students non school identity, such as family photos. She states this is important because the student's most significant involvement with literacy may be outside of school (Hansen,1992, p.66). Frazier and Paulson (1992, p. 63) sum it up best, "There are countless ways for students to organize portfolios. The format doesn't matter as long as students use the process for self-reflection and evaluation and take an active role in selecting materials and maintaining their portfolios.

This literature review covered strategies that may allow for the altering of classroom structure to minimize the whirlwind pace of the classroom for the students. It also addressed how to combine assessment and instruction, and how to establish assessment that provides reflection from students and teachers. And most importantly how to develop writers and readers into self-assessors.

Project Outcomes and Solution Components

While reviewing the literature, it became evident that self-assessment and portfolios were intertwined. It is impossible to find an article that mentions self assessment that does not do it in the context of discussing portfolio assessment. Portfolio assessment is the only methodology that responds directly to the goal of training students to assess their own success (Farr and Tone, 1994). It incorporates collecting and reviewing artifacts, understanding progress through record keeping, documenting interests and preferences, conferencing with teacher and peers. It also combines instruction with assessment that allows for self-reflection and self-evaluation.

The second grade class of Edgar Allan Poe Elementary school will begin the implementation of portfolio assessment September 5, 1994. Each student will conference with the teacher four times a year, at the end of each grading periods. At these scheduled conferences both the student and teacher will review and evaluate the student's growth as a writer. The student will set goals to be reached by the next conference. At the time of the next conference, the student will have completed a self-evaluation form determining whether the set goals have been met. The teacher will listen and respond to the student's assessment of growth and progress, making comments when there is need to elicit more information from the student. Then again, as in the first conference, the student will set goals for the next conference. During the final conference the student and teacher will evaluate the students's growth over the entire school year. Implementation of the portfolio assessment will conclude May 29, 1995. At that time, the student will pick two pieces of writing from each semester, a total of four, that will be placed in a cumulative writing folder that is passed on to the next year's teacher.

Solution Components

Students will be advised as to what and how items will be collected for their portfolio. Students will keep every piece of their writing from time of implementation until the first student-teacher conference. Before the conference, the student must have the portfolio organized. It is at this time that the student may carefully choose what does not need to be kept. The teacher will also have a chance to choose to keep something in the portfolio that the student may want to discard. It will be of the utmost importance that all drafts and revisions of final products be kept for comparison. This will help guide the students to see what would be appropriate pieces to keep and why it is important to keep certain pieces to be used for comparison.

As mentioned in the above information, student-teacher conferences will be held once every grading period, four times a year, to set and review goals. The portfolio conferences are the primary opportunity for the vital discussions that are at the heart if the portfolio process (Farr and Tone, 1994). Prior to these conferences it is essential that the students organize and review the contents of their portfolios, and the students must complete the self-evaluation form. These formal conferences will be held with students, as well as, daily informal conferences.

The classroom environment will have to support and promote process writing and portfolio assessment. This will be done through the physical layout of the classroom. The students' desks will be arranged around a center supply table that will hold the necessary supplies: a large supply of a variety of different types and sizes of paper, several staplers, stapler removers, scissors and tape, ready-made booklets, and folders for organization (Calkins,1986, and Farr and Tone,1994). This table will also hold a crate that contains finished folders for each student. In the finished folders the students will put any finished piece of writing with all drafts and copies. This will allow the teacher to read over the students' work outside of the writing time. There will

be areas around the edges of the room that the students may use for daily conferences with each other or the teacher (Calkins, 1986)

Not only will the physical environment of the classroom support process writing and portfolio assessment, but the classroom schedule will also. As Calkin (1986) states, "Students need the luxury of time. If they are going to have the chance to do their best, and then to make their best better, they need long blocks of time." Therefore, the same time each day will be devoted to writing. The routine of this time will be clear and simple and will not change. The routine will be as follows: mini-lesson talking five to fifteen minutes, a statement by each student describing what they will be working on that day, five minutes of independent, silent work time, then conferencing or collaborative writing may begin, clean-up, and sharing time. This routine follows Calkins (1986) writing workshop format.

Action Plan

As stated above implementation of process writing and portfolio assessment will begin on September 5, 1995 and conclude June 9, 1995. There will be four formal student-teacher conferences, coinciding with the grading periods, within that time frame. The teacher is in no way limited to only those four scheduled, formal conferences. Informal conferences can occur numerous times between the formal conferences. It will be during the scheduled, formal conferences that the student and teacher will set the goals for the students. It will be these goals that the student will be evaluated on.

On a day-to day bases the implementation will take the following form. There will be forty-five minutes daily given to writing instruction. The same time each morning will be set aside for this instruction. Within the time frame the same routine will be followed daily:

- A mini-lesson lasting between 5-15 dealing with anything from quick-tips, topic choice, revision, and editing.

- An oral statement from each child before getting their portfolio about what will be worked on that day. It is a verbal work agreement. It also helps focus the child before getting to work.

- The first 3-5 minutes of writing time must be quiet. The children must be in their seats. This too will help get them focused and ready to begin.

- After the first few minutes, then the children may begin to conference, work collaboratively, or write independently. This work time lasts about 25-30 minutes.

- Students are then asked to clean-up and return their portfolios to the storage area.

- Students who wish to share any writing may do so the last 5- 10 minutes. They are given feedback from the teacher and their peers.

Students access to their portfolios is not limited to this time only. The students may choose to work on their writing during any free-choice time, such as center time. It is important that the teacher circulate around the room during writer's workshop. The teacher must monitor students' progress, conference, and manage the classroom.

Methods of Assessment

Teacher observations, student surveys, and student interviews will be used to assess the effectiveness of the project. Students will be asked the same interview question that were asked before implementation. Answers will be compared and evaluated for further understanding of the writing process. Students will be asked to complete a self-evaluation form to determine the amount of progress they have observed throughout the year, how they feel about themselves as writers, and how they believe others feel about their writing.

Chapter 4

EVALUATION OF RESULTS AND PROCESSES

Historical Description of Intervention

The intervention implemented September 5, 1994 through June 9, 1995 was targeted at the writing self-assessment skills of the second grade classroom at Edgar Allan Poe Elementary School.

In the second grade classroom the intervention was a combination of portfolio assessment and process writing instruction in the form of writers' workshop. The intervention was implemented as stated in chapter 3 with only a few alterations. Students were instructed not to throw anything away and to date and keep all writing and drawings. It was hard for the students to get started the first few weeks. Most of the mini-lessons were simply going over the daily routine and discussing how to find topics to write about. Once a few of the students had written a piece and shared it with the class, then things started to click. The others soon began writing up a storm. The sharing time became the most important part of the writing time. It was important to use it not only for sharing of the writing, but also it helped to guide and motivate the other writers in the room. Student began sharing unfinished stories in order to get ideas and suggestions on where they should go now or what else the readers wanted to know.

Soon students were coming to school everyday with a topic and anxious to write. They were writing more pieces than the researcher could keep up with daily. It became obvious keeping track and reading all their pieces during workshop time would not be possible. The researcher was trying furiously to get around to see all the

students and to try to have an idea of what they all were working on. The plan of having informal conferences with the students daily was not working the way it had been envisioned. Some students needed help for 10-15 minutes. The researcher would be with this student anxiously watching the clock. That student or any other student in the class was not getting the time, attention and feedback they needed. The researcher was frantic and unsure of what everyone was working on and if they were working to their potential. The struggle went on for months as the researcher tried to devise a better way of keeping track of the students work without taking away their sense of ownership and control. At the first round of formal conferences, the researcher was overjoyed by the writing observed and at the same time scared to death. There were several students who had many writing pieces in their portfolios that the researcher had no idea they had been working on. After just a few conferences with the students the need for a change in the routine was realized.

On January 27th District 21 had arranged for Ralph Fletcher to come and speak to a small group of beginning teachers, of which the researcher was a member, about process writing. He held an informal workshop for the 12 teachers who attended. This was an affirming afternoon. He discussed the classroom environment, the daily routine, and publishing. All of the things he suggested should be going on in a classroom were being done. At the end of the afternoon he answered questions. He gave suggestions about keeping track and managing the students writing so that the teacher was aware of what the students were doing. He suggested using finished folders. A finished folder is simply a 2-pocket folder labeled on the outside with a students name and each pocket inside is labeled. One is labeled "finished" and the another is labeled "checked". When a student finished a piece of writing it went into the finished folder. Then the teacher would be able to read over it and leave a note to the student. The teacher could then check the folders outside of the writing time. Once

a piece had been read over it should be moved to the checked side. The student could then remove the piece from the finished folder and add it to his/her portfolio.

So finished folders were successfully started the next day. This became an essential part of the system and routine. It removed some of the time limitations. The guilty feeling if one student received 15 minutes of time was gone. The researcher now had a chance to see everyones writing and respond to it. Students also knew now that everything that they did mattered.

The students stored their writing in a portfolio box. They had a folder that they were to keep their self-assessments and evaluations. This folder as well as their writing was kept in a folding magazine holder. The students were given the container and asked to clearly write their name on the spine and then decorate the rest of it.

The first round of formal conferences began six weeks into the school year, with the hope of finishing up by the first grading period. They were not finished by the first grading period. It wasn't until half way through the second grading period that the last conference was held. It became very clear that the time restraints would not allow for conferences 4 times a year with the students and that adjustments would be made for conferences to take place only 2 times a year. Each conferences took about 20-25 minutes. Both the student and the researcher took notes during the conference and after the conferences the student set goals. The researcher was there with them individually as they set goals and only made suggestions or requested certain goals if the student was having trouble. In a few cases the goals were changed to reach the students potential or the researcher's expectations. Over all the students were impressively on target when setting their goals and determining what they needed to work on.

Prior to holding the first round of conferences, the researcher modeled how conferences would be conducted with students as a mini-lessons. This was done so

the students would know how to prepare and what to expect during the conferences. Setting goals and taking notes during the conference was also modeled. The note taking was the hard part for the students.

The final round of formal conferences will begin May 1, 1995. At that time the student will be asked to self-assess their progress through the year. They will review the goals that were set in the first conference and evaluate how well they reached the goals. They will also chose two writing samples that will be added to their cumulative district writing folder that will be sent next year's teachers.

The parents were able to view the portfolios at each of the two parent-teacher conferences held through the school year. Parents responded positively to the writing they saw at each conference. During the second parent-teacher conference something a little different was tried. The students came with their parents and together they went through the students portfolio before coming into the conference. This was an especially beneficial assessment tool. The students prepared for the night by going over their entire body of writing. They chose two pieces of writing from the beginning of the year and compared them to their more recent pieces. They formed webs to describe how their writing had changed and used that web to help them discuss their writing with their parents. Students also had to explain the daily routine of writing and the process they go through when they write. They shared their published pieces of writing. They explained why they had chosen those particularly pieces and the steps they went through to publish them. Everyone was able to discuss what the parents had seen and answer any questions they had about the portfolio or the writing time during the parent-teacher conference. All of the parents were excited and thrilled to see what their child had written. The response to the way the writing instruction had been presented to the students was also very positive.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Teacher observation, student surveys, and student interviews were the methods of assessment used to evaluate the effectiveness of the project.

The teacher observations of the implementation were all positive in regard to the students attitude and progress in writing and their ability to self-assess their own progress in writing. The progress made by the students and their enthusiasm toward writing made it worth all the time put in to the implementation.

The time restraints and demands were enormous. The preparation of the classroom environment was minimal, but it did require some collection of materials that were not available in the classroom. Extra supplies of tape, staplers, staple removers, folders, crates, magazine holders and various paper sizes were needed and had to be readily available before the implementation could take place. The time pressures were felt most at the start-up of the implementation. It was an adjustment for the teacher as well as the students. Letting go of some of the control of topics and writing style was difficult. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the conferencing, both informal and formal, was the most difficult to accomplish. There was just no way around the fact that long periods of free time were needed to conduct the conferences, and the students needed someone there to supervise and help them. Every time conferencing began there were always interruptions from the students themselves and the office, or it was time to go to specials or recess. Asking students to stay at recess to conference was tried, but those breaks were often needed for other things quite often; for example, getting to the copier, having a chance to use the restroom, planning with colleagues, or setting up for a math or science lesson. It would have been ideal to have a substitute for one day to just get the conferencing done.

Outside of the formal conferencing, time restraints were not a problem. Informal conferencing was a problem early in the implementation, but the uses of the finished

folders helped that situation greatly. The researcher felt as though she know who would need more time and guidance to realize their writing potential. More than anything else it helped the researcher realize that the students really were writing and writing well, and she felt accountable for their progress. Overall, the time restraint leveled out after the beginning of the implementation in all areas expect for the formal conferences.

The students were given two forms to complete periodically throughout the implementation. One form was given out only before the formal conference times and it required the students to take a more in depth look at their writing progress. The first time these forms were given it became obvious that students were no longer focusing on the mechanics of writing. Only five students responded with an answer dealing with mechanics of writing when asked what they liked to included in their writing. The other 18 students included such things as; details, specific character traits, specific topics, and ending choices. When asked what they liked about their writing three students stated their handwriting, one student replied about his use of punctuation, and one student stated her spelling. While the rest of the class responded as followed; three students discussed the amount of details added to their writing, nine students mentioned the type of genre the preferred. One student wrote, "That it helps you learn lots of interesting stuff!" Another student's response, "I think about my stories a lot.".

This form was given again at the end of the study. The results were not much different. There were still four students concerned with mechanics. Twelve students stated they like to include details, and six students stated good characters. The other students' answers included setting, and illustrations. Their responses to the question of what they like about their writing varied greatly. The answers ranged from handwriting to making people happy. Details and long stories were again mentioned quite often. Writing long stories is important to second graders and they realize that

details will make their stories longer. Having funny stories and characters became much more important to the group this time. Five students mention humor or funny in their responses. Three students discussed including a variety of settings. Three students liked the characters in their stories the most. One student wrote, "I like to add the cute little characters". Illustration got more attention this time around that previously with five students stating that their pictures were the thing they liked most about their writing. One student said he like the excitement of his stories best, while another student likes how he says things in his writing. This is wonderful progress compared to the interviews conducted before the implementation began where only five students even mentioned the word details and twenty students described their writing process as getting the words down and checking for spelling.

The other form used every 4-6 weeks was not as in depth or insightful as the form discussed above. It was however quicker and easier to administer. It gave a good surface look at how the students' attitude toward writing and writing assessment was changing. It mainly asks the students to look for a specific skill in their current writing. The students are allowed to choose the skill to look for in their writing. The first time this form was completed 20 of the 23 students looked for either neat handwriting, capitals at the beginning of sentences, or correct spelling. The second time the form was used only 16 students looked for those type of mechanical skills. There were, however, five students looking to see if they had added details to their writing. The third time the form was given the number of students looking for details increased to 7 and now 4 students were looking for genre variety that included fiction, nonfiction and plays. By the final time the form was given the students answers varied; four students were concerned about their details not only if they were included in the writing but if they were exciting or funny, three students were looking for good illustrations, now seven students were looking for strong characters in their writing,

and five student were checking if their stories made sense to the reader. One student was even looking for "Is my revising better?". There were three students who were looking for either spelling or punctuation.

The student interviews were conducted September 5 through September 23, 1995 and also conducted again April 6 through April 17, 1995. The September interviews revealed a lack of understanding of the writing process. Four of the 23 students had no idea why anyone would need to write. Nineteen of the 23 students felt good writing was using proper writing mechanics. Twenty of the students describe the writing process as pre-writing and checking for spelling.

In comparison, the April interviews demonstrate a far better understanding of the writing process. Twenty of the 23 students responded that writing was in some way a communication tool. Twelve of the students mentioned adding details or interesting stories were what made good writing. Seventeen students described the writing process that included pre-writing; getting ideas down on paper, revision; reading over the piece and making sure it says what you want, editing; checking for capitals and spelling, and finally publishing; making it into a book or sharing it with others. Twenty of the 23 students were able to give at least one topic they liked to write about. Eighteen of the 23 students were able to give examples of at least one thing they do well in their own writing. And most importantly, twenty-one of the students enjoy writing at school. Overall, the answers to the April interview were clearer and more explicit. Students seemed to have a greater understanding of the questions and were able to answer in far more detail that in September. The interview demonstrated the growth of their knowledge of the writing process and their abilities to self-assess writing during the implementation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Although it is a time demanding implementation, this has been a successful implementation. Both the students and the researcher have enjoyed writing this year. The students went further in their writing than could have ever been expected. Wonderful things happened this year. One example is the writing of plays. The class had not read any plays. But one of the students had the idea of writing a play. Two students sat down together and started writing one day. When the researcher approached them that day and inquired what they were working on, she was informed a horror show play. They were told it could not be violent and that there could not be any weapons in the play. They explained that they already knew that and it was a funny story and not a scary one. The researcher look at what they had written was very pleased. They had written everything as dialogue. So they were shown an example of a play in one of the analogies in the room. So they went to the computer and rewrote what they had one to the computer in the new format. For one week they were on the computer every day working on their script. Finally, it was announced that they were finished. They posted a sign-up sheet for the roles and had a complete cast in about 2 minutes. It was then decided that the play need a director and one of the writers agree to be the director and gave up a role, which was quickly filled. The researcher sat in on the first rehearsal of the play and discussed the responsibility they were taking by participating and explained anyone who did not behave appropriately would be asked to leave the production. After that day, the group would rehearse in the hallway outside the door of the classroom. Three days later they were ready to perform before our class. The researcher was sure it would not go well and would be chaotic. Everyone carried their script and read from it, but had included gestures and movements. They did a super job. So they took the show on the road and performed for other classes in the school.

Writing plays became a year long project. There was a Thanksgiving play that quickly followed the Horror Story. It was written independently by one of the writers of the first play. Then a new group of students rewrote The Lion King. And currently there is a Ghost Play touring the school. The researcher would not have ever imagined second grader could do something like this. They were in charge of the rehearsals and productions. They reviewed each production and were always looking for things to improve on for the next time. Each new play was better that the one before it.

Throughout the implementation significant progress was made in writing and in self-assessment of writing. The attitude and enjoyment of writing shown by this group of students was remarkable. That alone, without considering the progress, is enough to convince this researcher to continue the implementation. By far the students look forward to writing more than anything else done in the classroom. If there is an assembly or any change in the routine, the first question is always, "Will there still be writers' workshop?". The students are so unaware of how hard they are working. They start something and just want to keep on working. There have been days in the classroom that writers' workshop has lasted 90 minutes because it impossible to get the class to stop writing. It sounds unbelievable and it seemed unbelievable when it was happening.

They are able to look at their writing and compare it with their previous writing and identify what they are doing better. They see that good writing is not just neat handwriting and correct spelling. They appreciate and see the need for those things, but recognize that good writing is much more. The class discusses characters and illustrations. They write treasuries of stories about topics and characters. They are doing more than enjoying writing; they are becoming writers.

The surveys given to the students often reflected an understanding of the mini-

lesson or what had been taught recently in reading. For example, after doing character analysis in reading the students started writing stories with stronger characters. The teacher picked up on this and mini-lessons were then given focusing characters. The student surveys taken around that time shown an increased awareness of character. The same came be said when the class studied various illustrators. The surveys reflected an awareness of drawings and the importance of them. The students were able to apply and transfer all their language skills.

The conclusions drawn from the implementation are that students are able to self-assess their writing, and apply process writing. This is illustrated through the student surveys and the students ability to compare and discuss their writing. Some of this progress could be due in part to materation.

This researcher found the implementation to be successful and worth all the energy and time it took to implement. When trying it again there are several issues to be addressed. They include the time restraints for formal conferences, and getting more help within the classroom. There doesn't seem to be an easy answer to the time restraints caused by the formal conferences that are so important to this implementation. It has been mentioned before that having a substitute for a day to free the teacher would helpful. But that is not usually a decision left to the classroom teacher alone. If another staff member was implementing the program as well something might be worked out so you could trade planning time to cover each others classrooms. The need for time most be addressed before starting.

Having more hands in the classroom also would help. Encourage parents to help. Hold a meeting to explain what will be going on in the classroom and how they can help. There is a wonderful article, "Writing and reading in a first-grade Writers' Workshop: A parent's perspective" by Eleanor C. Baker, that you could give the parents to read. It discusses how you are helping the writer and not the writing. Have

parents help publish books and show them how to use the binding and laminating machines. Teach them how to be a good listeners. Just having someone to listen to the students stories would be incredibly helpful. Having a plan to handle the time limitations of the formal conferencing and having volunteers will help insure a smooth implementation.

As stated earlier, it was a hard adjustment for the researcher to give up some control. The researcher found she sent more time at the beginning of the implementation getting used to the classroom environment and routine. There could have been much more done with the self-assessment. It should have become part of the routine. For example, when a piece of writing was placed into the finished folder there should have been some type of self-assessment that could be completed then, dealing with only that one piece of writing. It should include such questions as; "What did you improve on in this piece?", "Did you try any thing new?", "What are you most proud of in this piece?", "Do you think you will write more about this topic or character?". Another suggestion is to model how to think about the questions on the student surveys. That might avoid getting the same answer to many of the questions. It is also suggestion to set days to complete the student surveys especially the quick and easy form. Plan on giving it the first day of each month, for example. That will allow the students to think ahead. Being prepared for the questionnaire may result in more thoughtful answers.

This has been a wonderful experience for both the researcher and the students. It was amazing what the students accomplished and how excited they were about writing. They pushed them further and explored more types of writing than would have been introduced without the implementation. It gave the students a far better understanding of the writing process and of themselves as writers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Interview Questions
and
Teacher Survey

STUDENT INTERVIEW

Why write?

Do you like to write? at home?

What things do you like to write about?

What things do you like about your writing?

How do other people feel about your writing?

Tell me about something you wrote that you liked a lot?

What steps do you go through when writing?

Do you know someone who is a good writer? What makes that person a good writer?

What steps do you think that person goes through?

What do authors do when they write?

Who is your favorite author?

What makes a story good?

TEACHER SURVEY

Do you teach a writing process that includes: prewriting, drafting, revision, and editing?

yes no

If so, what percentage of your class has an understanding of this process?

0%-25% 25%-50% 51%-75% 76%-100%

How much classtime is spent on writing instruction daily?

0-15 min. 0-30 min. 0-45 min. 45+

Do you believe the curriculum alots enough time to writing?

Who assesses your students' writing?

	How often? % of the time
teacher	
peer	% of the time
self	% of the time

TOTAL MUST EQUAL 100 %.

What type of assessment do you feel benefits your students most as writers?

teacher assessment peer assessment self assessment

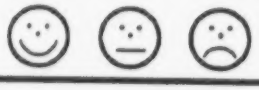
Appendix B

Student Survey Forms

Thinking About My Writing

Name _____ Date _____

This is what I will look for in my writing.

I found what I was looking for. 

1. This is how my writing makes me feel.

2. This is how my writing makes other people feel.

3. I picture in my head what I am writing about.

4. When I write, I think about the person who will read my writing.

5. I read over my writing to make it better.

6. I like to write things I have a drawn a circle around.

stories notes reports plays poems journals comics

Thinking About My Writing

Name _____ **Date** _____

Teacher _____ **Grade** _____

When I write, I like to include these kinds of things in my writing: _____

_____

I like these things about my writing: _____

_____

I can improve my writing by: _____

_____

I (do, do not) like my writing when: _____

_____

I get most of my ideas for my writing from: _____

_____

I think that other people (like, dislike) my writing because: _____

_____

I'd like to write more about: _____

_____

I think that one of the best things I have written is: _____

_____

One of the things that I think is my worst writing is: _____

_____

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Appendix C

Conference Forms

Conference Notes

Name _____ ___ __

Date _____

Purpose | What do I know? | Predict before? | Predict during? | Picture? | Make sense? | Make changes? | Get help?

Teacher's Notes:

Student's Notes:

Ways to Reach My Reading and Writing Goals

Name_____ **Date** _____

My goal is to...	*So I need to...*

Teacher's comments: